Becoming Vegan: The Theory of Planned Behavior and the Moderating Effect of Gender

Authors : Estela Díaz

Abstract : This article aims to make three contributions. First, build on the literature on ethical decision-making literature by exploring factors that influence the intention of adopting veganism. Second, study the superiority of extended models of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) for understanding the process involved in forming the intention of adopting veganism. Third, analyze the moderating effect of gender on TPB given that attitudes and behavior towards animals are gender-sensitive. No study, to our knowledge, has examined these questions. Veganism is not a diet but a political and moral stand that exclude, for moral reasons, the use of animals. Although there is a growing interest in studying veganism, it continues being overlooked in empirical research, especially within the domain of social psychology. TPB has been widely used to study a broad range of human behaviors, including moral issues. Nonetheless, TPB has rarely been applied to examine ethical decisions about animals and, even less, to veganism. Hence, the validity of TPB in predicting the intention of adopting veganism remains unanswered. A total of 476 non-vegan Spanish university students (55.6% female; the mean age was 23.26 years, SD= 6.1) responded to online and pencil-and-paper self-reported questionnaire based on previous studies. TPB extended models incorporated two background factors: 'general attitudes towards humanlike-attributes ascribed to animals' (AHA) (capacity for reason/emotions/suffer, moral consideration, and affect-towards-animals); and 'general attitudes towards 11 uses of animals' (AUA). SPSS 22 and SmartPLS 3.0 were used for statistical analyses. This study constructed a second-order reflective-formative model and took the multi-group analysis (MGA) approach to study gender effects. Six models of TPB (the standard and five competing) were tested. No a priori hypotheses were formulated. The results gave partial support to TPB. Attitudes (ATTV) (β = .207, p < .001), subjective norms (SNV) (β = .323, p < .001), and perceived control behavior (PCB) (β = .149, p < .001) had a significant direct effect on intentions (INTV). This model accounted for 27,9% of the variance in intention (R2Adj = .275) and had a small predictive relevance (Q2 = .261). However, findings from this study reveal that contrary to what TPB generally proposes, the effect of the background factors on intentions was not fully mediated by the proximal constructs of intentions. For instance, in the final model (Model#6), both factors had significant multiple indirect effect on INTV (β = .074, 95% C = .030, .126 [AHA:INTV]; β = .101, 95% C = .055, .155 [AUA:INTV]) and significant direct effect on INTV (β = .175, p < .001 [AHA:INTV]; β = .100, p = .003 [AUA:INTV]). Furthermore, the addition of direct paths from background factors to intentions improved the explained variance in intention (R2 = .324; R2Adj = .317) and the predictive relevance (Q2 = .300) over the base-model. This supports existing literature on the superiority of enhanced TPB models to predict ethical issues; which suggests that moral behavior may add additional complexity to decision-making. Regarding gender effect, MGA showed that gender only moderated the influence of AHA on ATTV (e.g., βWomen$-$$\beta$Men = .296, p < .001 [Model #6]). However, other observed gender differences (e.g. the explained variance of the model for intentions were always higher for men that for women, for instance, R2Women = .298; R2Men = .394 [Model #6]) deserve further considerations, especially for developing more effective communication strategies.

Keywords : veganism, Theory of Planned Behavior, background factors, gender moderation
Conference Title : ICEIP 2017 : International Conference on Ethical Issues and Psychology
Conference Location : Paris, France
Conference Dates : February 23-24, 2017